

The Use of Puppets and Fairy Tales
in Angela Carter’s Feminist Fiction:
The Magic Toyshop, “The Loves of Lady Purple,”
and “The Bloody Chamber”

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Introduction

Looking back on the 1960s in “Notes from the Front Line” (1983), Angela Carter states that it was the period that brought her to the question: “How that social fiction of my ‘femininity’ was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing” (38). This question seems to have developed until she demonstrated her notion of “gender performativity” fully in her last two novels, *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991), the feminist strategies of which have been considered to be more evident than those of her earlier works. However, in this article, I would like to examine her earlier works in order to reveal the subtle yet significant shift in her feminist strategies that occurred before she started to write from a different angle in her later works.

Carter’s earlier works, such as *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), which was written when, as she revealed in an interview with Anna Katsavos in 1994, “[she] really didn’t know what [she] was doing,” focus more on the power relationship between the stronger and the weaker in the traditional patriarchal system. And yet, though depicting the predicament of suppressed people, especially women in a patriarchal power structure, Carter was, as Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton state, “skeptical of work which suggested...that women were only the downtrodden victims of patriarchal oppression” (11).

This perspective seems to be expressed explicitly in two works published in 1979: *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, her criticism of the Marquis de Sade’s works, and her feminist rewritings of Perrault’s fairy tales, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. These works have received different responses. Some critics argued, pointing out her exploitation of pornography and sexual violence in *The Bloody Chamber*, that by using the framework of fairy tales, Carter is only ever confined within the patriarchal discourse. However, Carter’s main focus in her rewritings of fairy tales is not on the overwhelming patriarchal power she depicted in *The Magic Toyshop*, but on women’s subjectivity, the positive power women potentially possess. Rather than trapping

women in the old patriarchal confinement, she lets them follow their sexual desire, a tactic she describes in her writing as putting “new wine in old bottles” to make “the old bottles explode” (Carter 1983, 37).

I will focus on her three earlier works, *The Magic Toyshop*, “The Loves of Lady Purple” (collected in *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces*, 1974), and “The Bloody Chamber,” because these three works have two important motifs in common (puppets and “Bluebeard”) and because they reflect subtle changes in Carter as a feminist writer. They all depict the logic of patriarchy by using puppets to represent those oppressed by authority, which is subverted in different ways. The puppets reveal the unfair power relations that prevail between the strong and the weak, especially between men and women, within a patriarchal system. The intertextual use of Charles Perrault’s “Bluebeard” also plays an important role in each of the narratives. Perrault’s “Bluebeard” condemns women’s curiosity, but in Carter’s rewriting, Bluebeard is turned into a puppeteer, which exaggerates the logic of the patriarchal society by giving him absolute power to control those he oppresses. By comparing the use of puppets and “Bluebeard” in these works, I would like to argue that Carter’s focus as a feminist writer shifted from the representation of the unequal relations between the sexes in a patriarchal society to the exploration of women’s subjectivity.

In Chapter I, I will first examine the use of puppets in *The Magic Toyshop* and argue that puppets represent the unequal power relations that exist between Uncle Philip and the other characters. In addition, the plot itself has the characteristics of a fairy tale, and the tyrannical Uncle Philip appears as if Bluebeard to the protagonist Melanie, and his house and toyshop Bluebeard’s castle. By utilising the elements from familiar fairy tales, Carter exposes the monstrous injustice inherent in the conventional patriarchal discourse. Uncle Philip’s patriarchy is undermined by those suppressed, but whether the women in question gain freedom or not remains uncertain.

In Chapter II, I will argue that “The Loves of Lady Purple” focuses more

strongly on the power relations that prevail between men and women by depicting a male puppet master and a puppet of a prostitute. In this story, Carter creates a female “Bluebeard,” who finally destroys herself. Analyzing this story as another attempt at the subversion of the patriarchy helps us better understand the shift in Carter’s feminist vision, which she later develops further in “The Bloody Chamber.” The figure of Lady Purple can be regarded as Carter’s re-creation of Juliette in de Sade’s works, because much of the philosophy which she explained in *The Sadeian Woman* seems to be demonstrated here.

In Chapter III, I will argue that, in “The Bloody Chamber,” Carter focuses more on exploring female subjectivity than on exaggerating the unequal relations between men and women. As Alison Lee states, “her feminism is no more monolithic than the representations of female sexuality”; the protagonist, the Marquis’s young bride, reveals her sexual desires in her own words (x). The exposure of her sexual desire is not the same as that of Lady Purple’s in “The Loves of Lady Purple”: She does not become the predator of Sadeian logic, which states that women must partake in those who cause suffering if they do not want to suffer. This is how she confronts de Sade. Margaret Atwood also reads this story as “a ‘writing against’ de Sade, a talking-back to him” (136). Comparing this story with *The Magic Toyshop*, I will also argue that the ending of the story depicts the consequences of the subversion of patriarchy more explicitly and more positively than does *The Magic Toyshop*.

By examining the use of puppets in these three stories within an analytical framework provided by the “Bluebeard” motif, we can see how Carter’s feminist strategy gradually developed. Her engagement in depicting the negative usage of power by men under a patriarchy comes to be replaced by her exploration of women’s positive power. “The Bloody Chamber” depicts the world after the patriarchal authority is overturned and suggests women’s emancipation from the male gaze as another way of achieving freedom.

I . Bluebeard's Puppets in *The Magic Toyshop*

The Magic Toyshop is, as Lorna Sage states, “a classic rite-of-passage” story, consisting of elements of fairy tales: orphanage, entrance to a horrible world and escape from it (15). This story is especially reminiscent of Charles Perrault's “Bluebeard.” Perrault's “Bluebeard” is a rich man who has been widowed in a sequence. He again marries a girl in his neighbourhood. When he needs to go away on business, he leaves his new bride a bunch of keys of the rooms, telling her not to open one particular room. The bride, however, breaks the promise and opens the forbidden room in his absence. There she finds his previous wives dead and displayed. As he finds out that she has broken the promise, Bluebeard thinks she must die, too. Fortunately, she is rescued by her brothers at a critical moment and Bluebeard is killed by them. The central theme of this tale serves as a lesson for young women that they should not have curiosity. On the contrary, *The Magic Toyshop* is told from the viewpoint of a fifteen-year-old protagonist Melanie. Therefore, her real feelings including curiosity are revealed, through which the reader can notice the hidden aspects of patriarchy.

In *The Magic Toyshop*, the protagonist Melanie encounters a Bluebeard figure, Uncle Philip, who embodies exaggerated patriarchal authority. Having lost her parents in an airplane accident, Melanie, along with her younger siblings Jonathon and Victoria, is forced to give up the upper-middle-class life she had been leading, and leave her comfortable country house. The three move to live with their maternal uncle Philip Flower, his Irish wife Margaret, and Margaret's younger brothers Francie and Finn Jowle. At Uncle Philip's house, which contains his toyshop on the ground floor, Melanie is confronted with unreasonable rules and treatments. Melanie finds Aunt Margaret and her brothers Francie and Finn are metaphorically rendered into his puppets, and sees women are forced to perform his ideal image of femininity. This chapter will

argue that the power relations between Uncle Philip and the other characters are illustrated by the use of puppets in the framework of “Bluebeard.” By depicting Uncle Philip as a puppet master and Bluebeard, Carter exposes the injustice inherent in the conventional patriarchal discourse.

A. Uncle Philip as Bluebeard

The loss of her parents makes Melanie enter a world which, as Sage states, “works according to the laws of dreams, fairytales, folktales, myth, and magic” (15). Although this novel has been regarded as a realist fiction compared to Carter’s later works, it is still full of Gothic elements such as a monstrous figure, a haunted house and life-size dolls. Uncle Philip’s appearance is also precisely that of Perrault’s Bluebeard, in that his blue beard makes him look “ghastly” (Perrault 5). Just like his appearance, Uncle Philip’s house looks to Melanie as grotesque and horrifying as “Bluebeard Castle” (82). Uncle Philip’s power is exaggerated so much that his house is turned into the one found in fairy tales in Melanie’s consciousness.

In this story, puppets represent people suppressed by an overwhelming power that deprives them of all their subjectivity. Not only does Uncle Philip make toys that mock Margaret and her brothers, but he metaphorically renders them into toys and puppets and treats them as if they were only his toys and puppets. Their appearance and gestures look like those of puppets when Melanie first sees them. Francie walks as if he was “a tower falling, a frightening, uncoordinated progression in which he seemed to crash forward uncontrollably at each stride, jerking himself stiffly upright and swaying for a moment on his heels before the next toppling step” (34). Aunt Margaret looks like a bird, as if she were one of the “disconcertingly life-like” birds displayed in Uncle Philip’s toyshop (42). Besides, Margaret has been rendered unable to speak since marriage, and forced to communicate with people by handwriting. Without speaking, she only obeys Philip’s “brusque commands” (124); she lost the ability

to express her subjectivity via speech.

Melanie is also metaphorically rendered into a puppet. She feels she has lost her humanity, and her body moves mechanically and automatically. There are neither mirrors nor books accessible for Melanie in Philip's house because, as Sage points out, it is "the world you find in books and mirrors, the region of copies and images and representations" (15). People are reduced to the images reflected in the mirrors, that is, imitations of people just like puppets. Melanie's confusion between the original and the copy appears clearly when she is forced to act in a drama of a classic Greek mythology, "Leda and the Swan," in Uncle Philip's puppet theatre. She, in the role of Leda, is raped by a swan puppet Uncle Philip manipulates. Threatened by the swan mounting on her, she feels "herself not herself, wrenched from her own personality, watching this whole fantasy from another place...The swan towered over the black-haired girl who was Melanie and who was not" (166). She seems unable to distinguish herself in the real world from the copy of herself in a constructed world. Under Uncle Philip's authorial power, the border between humans and puppets, the original and copy, and the real and imitation disappears. The distinction between them does not matter to him, for all he wants to do is to control everything in his world.

B. Uncle Philip as a Puppet Master

Uncle Philip is obsessed with puppetry and occasionally performs it in his own puppet theatre, which is attached to his workplace in the basement of his house. The audience, though only Margaret and his adopted children, is forced to greet it with applause. The puppet theatre serves as the secret room of "Bluebeard," a miniature copy of his patriarchal tyranny, where power and violence are imposed. Philip's control over Margaret and her brothers is reflected in the performance titled "GRAND PERFORMANCE—FLOWER'S PUPPET MICROCOSM," in which they are forced to play a certain role on the stage.

Francie plays the fiddle for Philip's puppet theatre with his face "expressionless" like "living stone" (Carter 1967, 126). Although Finn is allowed to manipulate one of Philip's puppets, he falls off on the stage as if a puppet with the "arms and legs splayed out in abandon, forgotten" as the result of offending Philip with his unexperienced puppet handling (131). A puppet of Mary, Queen of Scots that parodies Margaret appears on the stage manipulated by Uncle Philip. Seeing the puppet of the Queen in a collar, Margaret touches her own choker, which Philip makes her wear, as if the queen's choker "reminded her how much her own one hurt" (129-30). As the title of the performance indicates, his puppet theatre is just a representation of what he does to Margaret and her brothers in everyday life.

Soon comes Melanie's turn to act in his puppet theatre. As already mentioned, Melanie is diminished to the puppet of Leda and is raped by a puppet swan manipulated by Uncle Philip. In "Leda and the Swan," a woman Leda is raped by a swan in which Zeus is disguised. Uncle Philip justifies his patriarchal power by conforming them to the story of god, and making the puppet swan represent his desire. By manipulating the puppet swan that represents Zeus, the mythical father, he deifies himself, and shows his patriarchal power in a visible way. By rendering people into puppets, he forces them to play to his ideal. Therefore, he becomes displeased at Melanie's overacting, for "[puppets] don't overact" (167). More unreasonably, he resents her only because "she [is] not a puppet" (144).

As is reflected in the puppet that parodies Margaret, Uncle Philip fetishises Margaret by means of a silver choker he makes for her. He makes her to wear it on Sundays, when, as Finn reveals, they "make love" (114). As Melanie observes, the choker is so tight that she can hardly move her head or eat. Not only does the choker, due to its tightness, represent her submission to Uncle Philip's power, but since its name derives from the verb 'to choke,' it also represents Philip's wish to kill Margaret symbolically. While she straggles

to eat, Uncle Philip gazes at her “with expressionless satisfaction, apparently deriving a certain pleasure from her discomfort, or even finding that the sight of it [improves] his appetite” (113). By taking her life away, he renders her into a puppet, a body without a soul, upon which he executes certain acts of sexual violence. Men's obsession with a certain part of women's bodies develops further in “The Bloody Chamber,” which will be argued in Chapter Three.

C. The Subversion of Patriarchal Power

Although Uncle Philip's power over his family seems absolute and everlasting, it is undermined gradually by Margaret and her brothers without his knowledge. Importantly, a glimpse of his absolute power's fragility is revealed by Melanie's curiosity, which is condemned in traditional patriarchal society, as can be seen in “Bluebeard.” Melanie's curiosity leads the reader to the family's brief freedom. On the first night at Uncle Philip's house, led by the tones of a fiddle and a flute, Melanie comes down to the door of the living room. She witnesses through the keyhole of the door (which is reminiscent of Bluebeard's key), Margaret and her brothers playing music and dancing in Philip's absence. The sight suggests that when Bluebeard is away, the fairy-tale-like spell on the house is broken, and the puppets can regain their subjective humanity. Margaret has recovered her liveliness so that her hair looks as if it is “flaming” (Carter 1967, 51) and her eyes shine like “stars” (52). Melanie also finds a spyhole in the wall that divides her room from the brothers', through which she sees “the terra incognita” of the brothers' bedroom, lit by an unshaded central lamp” (108). In this “terra incognita,” or unknown and unexplored region, Melanie finds a painting of Aunt Margaret that appears vivid and lively. The image of Margaret sits “naked” with “a cloak of brilliant green,” her hair “a mound of fire” and her breasts are “on the point of turning into roses” (108). Margaret looks here again full of life, totally opposite to her manner in Philip's presence. Melanie's curiosity thus reveals how Margaret and her brothers manage to stay

“substantial” (77) under the weight of Uncle Philip, and shows the reader that his patriarchy has been undermined.

Although Margaret has been rendered mute since marriage, it did not deprive her of all means of self-expression. In addition to handwriting and eye contact, which she utilises in intimate moments with her brothers, she enjoys music and cooking. The meals Margaret provides are, as Sarah Sceats argues, also an “eloquent means of expression” (122). On the first day at Uncle Philip’s, Melanie sees “Aunt Margaret [preside] over the table with placid contentment, urging them to eat with eloquent movements of the eyes and hands” (47). Her self-expression through the meals can be also seen in the ending of the story when Uncle Philip is away:

The very bacon bounced and crackled in the pan for joy because Uncle Philip was not there...It would have been a pity not to have appreciated the breakfast, which was lavish...Aunt Margaret must have fried up everything friable in the larder... (183–84)

The festive atmosphere indicates that she is cooking with pleasure in the kitchen, the only place where she is allowed to dominate mostly and move rather freely. A large amount of food indicates her affections towards her family, and also implies her opposition to her husband. Thus, the means of her self-expression indicate she has not been completely rendered into Philip’s puppet, but still has her own volition.

Finn, on the other hand, undermines Uncle Philip’s power by metaphorically taking it away. For example, he sits in Philip’s chair, which gives him “authority” and makes him seem “of more consequence” (184). Furthermore, Finn destroys the puppet swan, which metaphorically raped Melanie.

Finn’s confession that he destroyed the puppet swan triggers the subversion of Uncle Philip’s tyranny. Feeling liberated from Philip’s power and command, the characters start to enjoy Philip’s absence. However, the carnivalesque atmosphere is broken when Philip returns and finds Margaret in

Francie's arms, the evidence of their incestuous relationship. Philip at rage sets a fire in the toyshop in order to kill his unfaithful wife and her brother, which, as a result, burns down his toyshop. Before Finn and Melanie escape, Margaret says "we must stay and finish our business with Philip" (197). Finally freed from Philip's power, she regains her voice and declares she will fight against him. As Melanie has witnessed a couple of times in Philip's absence, Margaret looks as if "a goddess of fire; her eyes burned and her hair flickered about her" (197).

The final scene is controversial because it depicts neither the survival of the characters after the fire except for Finn and Melanie, nor what those who have survived will do with the freedom they have earned. While they are watching the house burn, Finn and Melanie seem to be lost, not knowing what to do:

'My bear. He's gone. Everything is gone.'

'Nothing is left but us.'

At night, in the garden, they faced each other in a wild surmise. (200)

Aidan Day takes a positive view of this scene: "It is possible to see Melanie and Finn, when they escape from burning house, as examples of a different kind of human being — a kind where relationship is defined not in terms of oppression and subservience but in terms of equality" (31). However, it is unclear whether their relationship is now equal or not, for Melanie remains dependent while Finn has the power to change the situation.

In contrast, Sarah Gamble states "the very ambiguity that surrounds Finn's role in the narrative hints at the chance that he may merely be the patriarch's successor" (45). Truly, Finn succeeded to a part of Philip's patriarchy. For example, he learned puppetry from Philip and was sometimes allowed to manipulate Philip's puppets. The way he undermined Philip's power also implies his potential as a successor. Furthermore, He commented on Melanie's appearance early on: "You've lovely hair" (45), and "What nice legs you have" (190). These comments are exactly the same as those Uncle Philip

once made: “And you’ve got quite nice hair. And pretty legs” (144). Finn might have inherited Uncle Philip’s “colorless eyes,” which are “judging and assessing her all the time” (92). The relationship between the patriarchal power and the male gaze cannot be ignored, for as we will see it anticipates Carter’s more developed view on the power of the gaze, evident in “The Bloody Chamber.”

As I have argued, the power relations between Uncle Philip and the other characters are represented by those between a puppet master and puppets. By metaphorically rendering people into puppets, Uncle Philip manipulates them into performing his ideal images. Although Uncle Philip’s patriarchy is subverted by the destruction of his toyshop, the ambiguous ending implies that Carter seems to have been uncertain of what women could do after the subversion of patriarchy. However, it is possible to argue that the ending seems to serve as a criticism of the kind of feminism in the 1960s that only sought to subvert the patriarchal system.

II. The Fate of a Female Bluebeard in “The Loves of Lady Purple”

“The Loves of Lady Purple” can be divided into two parts; one describes the real world and the other is the world of the puppet theatre. A puppet master, who is introduced as an Asiatic Professor, is a travelling showman, accompanied by two assistants. At his traveling theatre, he performs a single drama titled *The Notorious Amours of Lady Purple: the Shameless Oriental Venus*, which tells the life of a prostitute called Lady Purple.

“The Loves of Lady Purple” shares with *The Magic Toyshop* the use of puppets, intended to demonstrate power relations between the strong and the weak in a patriarchal world. However, one of the most important differences is that while in *The Magic Toyshop* not only the female characters but also the male figures (Francie and Finn) are rendered into puppets, “The Loves of Lady Purple” focuses more exclusively on women under patriarchal power by depicting

the relationship between a male puppet master and the puppet of a prostitute. This structure reveals a doubled inferiority that is being ascribed to Lady Purple: the puppet of Lady Purple is manipulated by a male puppet master, and the puppet; human made, the prostitute Lady Purple who is depicted serving her male customers in the play. However, the latter inferiority is subverted by Carter's transformation of Lady Purple into a female Bluebeard.

Lady Purple's monstrous character recalls Juliette in Marquis de Sade's works, and, therefore, can be regarded as a female Bluebeard. Sarah Gamble regards this reincarnation of Juliette as Carter's exploitation of "the possibilities of fiction in order to render the same argument [as Sade's works] on a horribly literal level" (Gamble 1997, 105). Carter explained her criticism of de Sade's works five years later in *The Sadeian Woman*, but much of her philosophy had already been demonstrated in "The Loves of Lady Purple." As she would later criticise Juliette's monstrosity in *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter here gives a negative ending to the subversion of patriarchy attempted by her female Bluebeard.

A. Puppets and Prostitution

The Asiatic professor has a godlike skill at puppetry. He manipulates his puppets "with an exquisite precision" so that the puppets look lifelike and completely imitate human beings (Carter 1974, 37). Like Uncle Philip, the Professor is obsessed with puppetry, and he shows "benign indifference to everything except the simulacra of the living he himself [creates] (48). For him, the puppet of Lady Purple is not only "a medium" through which to reveal his passions, but also a means through which he performs his power over the puppet (49).

[S]he was nothing but a curious structure until the Professor touched her strings, for it was he who filled her with necromantic vigour. He transmitted to her an abundance of the life he himself seemed to possess

so tenuously and, when she moved, as a monstrous goddess, at once preposterous and magnificent, who transcended the notion she was dependent on his hands and appeared wholly real and yet entirely other. (50)

The puppet of Lady Purple looks real and symbolizes all the essence of femininity, but it all depends on the Professor's godlike skill. Outside the play, she is again nothing but "only mundane wood" (51), which drifts "at nobody's volition but that of the wind" (56-57), or swings "idly, this way and that way, from her anchored strings" when the Professor touches it (56). Thus, the relationship between the male puppet master and the female puppet represents the unequal power relations that exist between the sexes.

In addition, it is significant that the female puppet plays the role of a prostitute in the puppet theatre in the story. The fact that prostitutes who are to serve men by means of their sexuality are manipulated by the male puppet master and his male assistant exaggerates men's superiority and women's subordination.

The puppet of Lady Purple is made to play the role of a prostitute even outside the puppet theatre. The Asiatic Professor's fetishism is revealed by his treatment of the puppet. He never allows anyone to touch it, and he cannot sleep "unless she [lies] beside him" (50). Like Uncle Philip's, the Professor's extraordinary obsession with his puppet can be seen in his particularity regarding its costume. It is when he is mending her costume — for taking care of her costume and jewellery is his routine — that the Professor is suddenly seized with the desire to see the puppet of Lady Purple in a beautiful *kimono* costume. Having been dressed and decorated, it seems that "her dry wood [has] all at once put out an entire springtime of blossoms for the old man alone to enjoy" (57). As Uncle Philip likes to see his wife in the tight silver choker, and derives his sexual appetite from the sight, the Professor probably gains a certain excitement from the sight, too.

The relationship between the puppet master and the puppet of a prostitute thus reveals a doubled female inferiority. Lady Purple is not only manipulated by the male puppet master into performing his ideal image of femininity, but, both in the puppet play and in reality, Lady Purple provides men with sexual satisfaction. Carter makes it explicit that women are often reduced to commodities that satisfy men's sexual desire in the patriarchal society.

B. The Subversion of Patriarchy

The doubled female inferiority is reversed by the monstrous sexuality of Lady Purple in the puppet theatre. In the drama, although Lady Purple is a prostitute, a woman who is supposed to be inferior to men due to the submissive characteristics already mentioned, she is portrayed as being as ferocious and violent as Bluebeard. She is so carnivorous as to seduce her foster father at only the age of twelve, deprive him of all his money and finally kill him and his wife. To conceal her murder, she sets fire to their house and moves into a brothel. At the brothel, she starts to kill her lovers "for pleasure" (Carter 1974, 52), for she is "the sole perpetrator of desire" with "proliferated malign fantasies all around her," and uses her lovers "as the canvas on which she [executes] boudoir masterpieces of destruction" (53). This means that inasmuch as Lady Purple is taking a man's role, the primary power relations between men and women have been reversed: This is how Carter attempts in one more way the subversion of patriarchy in this story.

This construction of Lady Purple is just as subversive as that of Juliette in the Marquis de Sade's works. As Carter argues in *The Sadeian Woman*, Juliette "proposes a method of profane mastery of the instruments of power" and "[acts] according to the precepts and also the practice of a man's world and so she does not suffer. Instead she causes suffering" (Carter 1979 b, 90). Yet, she denies Juliette's strategy for survival: "A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster. Her freedom will be a condition of personal privilege that deprives

those on which she exercises it of their own freedom” (30). Carter’s denial of the female Bluebeard is reflected in the ending of both the puppet play and the story, depicting Lady Purple’s repetition of former actions. In the puppet play, as soon as her prosperity ends, Lady Purple is reduced to a tramp and practices “extraordinary necrophilias” on the seashore. She repeats what she has done as a prostitute until she finally becomes “a marionette herself, herself her own replica” (55).

On the other hand, in the real part of the story, the puppet of Lady Purple becomes a human when the Professor gives her a kiss, which was a nightly habit of his:

The sleeping wood had wakened...Across her suddenly moving face flashed a whole kaleidoscope of expression, as though she were running instantaneously through the entire repertory of human feeling, practicing...So, unaided, she began her next performance with an apparent improvisation which was, in reality, only a variation upon a theme. She sank her teeth into his throat and drained him. (57–58)

The puppet wakens as a human being, exactly opposite to the situation portrayed in Lady Purple’s puppet play. Although the puppet master’s patriarchy is subverted by her killing of him, the influence of his power still exists within her. The puppet of Lady Purple absorbs all the air from the Professor’s lungs and all the blood from his body as if she were in a rage against the Professor’s fetishist desire. The Professor’s patriarchy seems to be subverted by Lady Purple here, however, she only continues in confinement. This is assured by the fact that the wakened lady Purple ends up absorbing all the patriarchal breath and blood from her master, without which, it seems, she could not live. The human Lady Purple in the real world is as monstrous as the Lady Purple of the play. What she does after this transformation is only a repetition of the role she had been forced to play in the Professor’s puppet theatre; she sets fire to his theatre and goes to a brothel like “a homing pigeon” (59). Although

she has rid herself of the strings that had controlled and confined her, she is still trapped within patriarchal convention. Lady Purple's failure to emancipate from the patriarchal convention is clearly depicted as follows:

But whether she was renewed or newly born, returning to life or becoming alive...the brain beneath the reviving hair contained only the scantiest notion of the possibilities now open to it. All that had seeped into the wood was the notion that she might perform the forms of life not so much by the skill of another as by her own desire that she did so... (59)

This indicates Lady Purple does not know how to use her freedom. Although she achieved an escape from patriarchal power itself, she remains beholden to the influence patriarchal power has had on her.

Lady Purple's entrapment within the structure of patriarchal power can be also seen in the incompetence of her speech. While *The Magic Toyshop* is told from Melanie's viewpoint, "The Loves of Lady Purple" is told by a coherently objective and explanative third-person narrator; therefore, the mind of Lady Purple can never be seen or heard. Carter's intention was likely to show Lady Purple's inhumanity: "The world of Juliette is a mechanistic one" (Carter 1979 b, 120). Even after Lady Purple becomes a human, her feelings are explained, and we are given no words of her own:

First, she shivered with pleasure to feel the cold, for she realised she was experiencing a physical sensation; then either she remembered or else she believed she remembered that the sensation of cold was not a pleasure one so she knelt and, drawing off the old man's shawl, wrapped it carefully about herself. (58)

Although being a human, Lady Purple is no more than a puppet; it seems that she has no means to express herself, or what is worse, even nothing to express.

By creating a female Bluebeard, Carter not only presents female sexual subjectivity that has been oppressed, ignored and rendered invisible in a radical

way, but also suggests the problem of reversed sexual power relations. She also criticised the dualistic power structure that consists of predators and victims, for the reversal of it would not make any sense. Furthermore, she demonstrates the limitation of women's freedom after the patriarchy is subverted through violence. Carter explores female sexuality from a different angle in "The Bloody Chamber," which will be argued in the next chapter.

III. Women's Subjectivity in "The Bloody Chamber"

In "The Bloody Chamber," Carter rewrites Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard," rendering it into a story with more feminist elements. Like Melanie, the seventeen-year-old protagonist enters a new world and discovers a monstrous aspect of patriarchy; she marries the Marquis, much older and the "richest man in France" (Carter 1979 a, 137). One of the most important differences from Perrault's original is that in Carter's retelling the bride is rescued not by her brothers but by her courageous mother.

The Marquis's patriarchal power is represented mostly by his visual power, especially his visual obsession. The bride is always exposed to his gaze, and she is only one part of the pornographic collections he possesses. However, Carter does not simply depict the visual dynamics in which men look at women, but she exploits men's visual violence as a means to reveal women's sexual awakening.

Since the protagonist, as the narrator of the story, tells the experience of her marriage to the Marquis as her own version of "Bluebeard," she places herself outside the fairy-tale structure, whereas Melanie lived within it. Aidan Day analysed the role of the retrospective first-person narrator as follows:

There is a clever double narratorial perspective throughout this tale. The retrospective perspective of the woman narrator, who knows the full depravity of the Marquis, manages to capture the innocent perspective of herself as girl and her gradual, incremental loss of that innocence. (154)

From her retrospective point of view, the bride depicts the Marquis' extraordinarily savage practice, but more importantly, she reveals the intermingled feelings of fear and pleasure that arise in sexual contexts.

In addition, based on the arguments she made earlier in *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter marks the bride as a new kind of woman, belonging neither to Juliette, the predator, nor Justine, the victim. That is, she neither causes suffering nor victimises herself. As Margaret Atwood states, Carter seems to be "looking for ways in which the tiger and the lamb, or the tiger and lamb parts of the psyche, can reach some sort of accommodation" (136). The bride partly performs this accommodation.

This chapter will first explain the Marquis's visual obsession, then examine the bride's sexual subjectivity as revealed in her own words. It will then argue that the female characters are here depicted as stronger and more independent than those of the other two stories, with more explicit descriptions of their actions after the subversion of patriarchy takes place.

A. The Marquis's Patriarchal Power

Although as in *The Magic Toyshop* and "The Loves of Lady Purple," the Marquis's patriarchal power is represented by his control of his bride's apparel, the power is represented much more significantly by his visual obsession. First of all, his eyes have a certain power over the bride. On the first day of their wedding, on their way to his castle by train, he watches her with eyes as "dark and motionless as those eyes the ancient Egyptians painted upon their sarcophagi" (137), and furthermore, in their matrimonial bed, he observes her as if he was a "connoisseur inspecting horseflesh" (136). The details related to his eyes - "the sheer carnal of avarice" and "strangely magnified by the monocle lodged" (136) in it - is, as Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère says, "a telltale sign of his visual obsession" (134).

The Marquis is in fact a connoisseur of paintings and pornography, the

collections of which the bride finds along the corridors of his castle as well as in his library. The bride picks up from his collections of pornography a book titled “*The Adventure of Eulalie at the Harem of the Grand Turk*” (142). This title links to a scene, in which the Marquis, satisfied with a dozen figures of his wife reflected in a dozen mirrors arranged around the bedroom, says “I have acquired a whole harem for myself!” (140). His idea of making his own “harem” by using mirrors seems to come from the images in his pornographic collections. This indicates that he does not distinguish his real life from the world of pornography, and moreover, his wife is only one item in his collection. Caleb Sivyver explains the visual power relations between the couple as follows:

The Marquis represents the dominant scopic position within patriarchal society: the active, gazing position, the one who looks. His perspective dominates his wife’s and their relationship is conducted in such a way as to satisfy his desires...By contrast, his bride occupies the passive role of the object gazed at, assuming her husband’s perspective on herself (seeing herself as he sees her) and identifying with the self-images he offers her. (n. pag)

The Marquis’ fetishism is described with a more detailed focus on his visual obsession, compared to those of the male characters in *The Magic Toyshop* and “The Loves of Lady Purple”; which therefore exaggerates his perversity. He likes to see his wife in the white muslin because her breasts show through the material “like little soft white doves that sleep, each one, with a pink eye open” (144). The choker of rubies looks as “bright as arterial blood,” tied around her neck at the point where, as if the Marquis were anticipating this, the blade of a guillotine could cut it through. These images of doves and a guillotine, associated with punishment, imply his obsession with innocence, as his bride herself later realises, thinking “how it must have been my innocence that captivated him” (145). The forbidden room, which the bride opens in his absence, is as she says “a little museum of his perversity” (155). There displayed his

previous wives' dead corpses along with torture tools. One of them has been reduced to only a skull and bones, but still decorated with "a wreath of white roses, and a veil of lace," which underscores the fact that his perversity depends much on visual stimulation (156).

Thus, the power of his eyes is depicted overall with a great significance in the relationship between the Marquis and his wife, with the Marquis taking the dominating position. However, the power relationship between the couple is reversed in the bride's rescue scene, when the Marquis sees her mother coming closer to him on a horse with a gun in her hand. The relationship is represented in terms of the puppet motif for the first time in the story: "The puppet master, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last, saw his dolls break free of their strings" (168). The subversion of his patriarchy seems to be completed with his dolls' liberation and his following death, but contrary to expectations, before he is shot to death, the Marquis is metaphorically rendered into a toy, such as the "clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs," and roars as if "a curious child pushed his centime into the slot and set all in motion" (169). He becomes the object to be looked at, while, having escaped from her strings, the bride is watching him. Thus, as in *The Magic Toyshop* and "The Bloody Chamber," Carter depicts the power relations between the sexes by the use of puppets, but here she interweaves the dynamics of the gaze into the depiction.

B. Women's Subjectivity

Since she is the narrator of the story, the bride has the power of speech, which women such as Margaret and Lady Purple are not allowed to possess in Carter's earlier works. The bride's retrospective perspective reveals her mixed feelings of fear and pleasure in sexual contexts and does not confine women within the patriarchal myth of female passivity.

He stripped me, gourmand that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke...I saw, in the mirror, the living image of an etching by

Rops from the collection he had shown me when our engagement permitted us to be alone together ... the child with her sticklike limbs...bare as a lamb chop. Most pornographic of all confrontations. And so my purchaser unwrapped his bargain ... I was aghast to feel myself stirring. (140)

In this passage, Carter recapitulates the philosophy she explained in *The Sadeian Woman* regarding the bride's power of speech. Aidan Day states that "‘The Bloody Chamber’ needs to be read in the light of Carter's observation in *The Sadeian Woman*" (160), quoting Carter's statement that a "moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of existent relations between the sexes" (Carter 1979 b, 22), whereas standard pornography "reinforces the archetypes of [female] negativity" (19). He regards passages from "The Bloody Chamber," including the one quoted above, as successful attempts at moral pornography to some extent. The scene depicts both the male and female perspectives. Seeing women as an artichoke or a lamb chop can be regarded as a masculine view, and the bride admits her arousal. Therefore, it effectively criticises "the existent relations between the sexes," not ignoring the female perspective.

It is important to remember that the story is narrated by the bride herself. Taking this into consideration, it can be noticed that the bride herself is illustrating the Marquis' objectification of her. That is, she can describe the situation from both the male and female points of view. Therefore, it can be argued that she is more flexible in perceiving the logic of sexuality than Justine and Juliette, who are both single-minded:

Justine is the thesis, Juliette the antithesis; both are without hope and neither pays any heed to a future in which might lie the possibility of a synthesis of their modes of being, neither submissive nor aggressive, capable of both thought and feeling. (Carter 1979 b, 90-91)

As already argued in the former chapter, it is explicit that Carter holds a negative view of female monsters, as Juliette represents. However, it is more

important here to note that Carter also questions the extraordinary obsession with female virtue performed by Justine. Justine is haunted by virtue; therefore, she is not free. Based on this notion, a sexually liberated woman can partly be seen in the image of the bride. In other words, she neither confines herself within the western myth of female passivity nor becomes too honest about her own desires.

C. The Independence of Women

The bride is depicted as independent both financially and professionally. Before marriage, she used to play the piano "in the salon of the princess" (Carter 1979 a, 138). After the Marquis' death, she inherits his wealth but gives "most of it away to various charities," and also gives his castle away to found "a school for the blind" (169). Although she spends the rest of it to start a little music school in Paris, she is not so economically dependent on Marquis' wealth, for the establishment of the music school promises she will be able to make living on her own. Unlike Melanie, she has skills and occupation that allow her to stay independent.

While the Marquis is obsessed exclusively with visual pleasure, the bride's other senses are acute: she also hears, smells and senses. For example, in addition to the fact that she has the ears of a pianist, she can sense his presence by his "opulent male scent of leather and spices," and she feels her satin nightdress "teasingly [caress] [her], egregious, insinuating, nudging between [her] thighs" (132). A blind young man, Jean-Yves, is employed as her piano-tuner in the middle of the story, but it turns out that he is the protagonist's new lover at the end of the story. After they are rescued by her mother from the Marquis' fatal punishment, they settle down together to start a new life. Aidan Day states that Jean-Yves is "not diminished as a man by his symbolic blindness" but is rather "symbolically magnified as a man by virtue of the fact that in his blindness he does not fix and objectify his partner through the

masculine gaze” (157). Indeed, his blindness marks him as the image of a new kind of a man who is not affected by visual elements, and therefore, does not force women to perform particular images of femininity. In this way, his blindness allows the protagonist to emancipate herself from the male gaze. Kathleen E. B. Manley makes an interesting argument about the protagonist’s skills and the relationship between the new couple:

In addition, her sense of herself as a musician allows her to assert herself in a field in which she is more knowledgeable than her husband: when she finds that her bridal-gift piano is slightly out of tune, her perfect pitch prevents her from practicing.... This musical discrimination...causes her to demand that her husband add a piano-tuner to the staff (88).

If she did not have good musical sensibility, she could not have encountered Jean-Yves. This means her mother might have failed to rescue her, because Jean-Yves helps her mother enter the courtyard by removing the great bolts from the gate. Her skill thus allows her to open up her own future, instead of depending on the Marquis to write the script of her life.

Melanie, though she escaped from Uncle Philip’s tyranny, still remains in the scope of Finn’s gaze, for it was a daily practice for him to look at her hair and legs, and watch her through a spyhole. Historically, women have always been the objects of the male gaze. However, by introducing a blind man as the protagonist’s new lover, Carter proposes a new form of relationship between the sexes, which is not affected by the Sadeian dualism of visual power: viewer and object.

Although Carter depicted the Marquis’s visual power explicitly, she seems to have exploited it so as to reveal the bride’s sexual desires. Employing a first-person narrator, she explored one way in which women could live while following their desires. Instead of confining herself among the virtues of conventional femininity, the bride performs the role of a new woman that belongs neither to the predators nor to the victims. Carter also proposes a new form of

relationship, introducing a blind piano-tuner in her Bluebeard story.

Conclusion

As I have argued, the motifs of puppets and "Bluebeard" are used strategically in the three works examined. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Bluebeard is Uncle Philip, who is a puppeteer and a toyshop owner, who controls his family as he does his puppets. The puppet theatre can be regarded as Bluebeard's secret room, a place where puppets act out the power relations between men and women, the former possessing power and subjectivity and the latter deprived of subjectivity. Much the same way as Bluebeard collects and displays the bodies of the women he murdered in the forbidden room, Uncle Philip manipulates the puppet of Margaret in her choker, following a script appropriate to his self-centred fantasy. Further, Philip sexually abuses Melanie in a symbolic way when he indirectly rapes her on the stage by manipulating his puppet swan.

The puppet theatre that epitomises Philip's patriarchal tyranny is burnt down in a fire set by himself in a rage over Margaret and Francie's incestuous relationship. This implies that the patriarchy has been subverted. However, the subversion is triggered not by Melanie but by the other members of the family. She is still too young and too inexperienced to take actions against the patriarchy. After Uncle Philip has gone, Melanie and Finn are left alone. The story ends here without any implication of what they are going to do with the freedom they have gained. This amounts to Carter's critique of the tendency of some feminists in the 1960s to only seek for the subversion of patriarchy, and who believed that it would automatically bring them a bright future.

"The Loves of Lady Purple" focuses on the power relations between men and women by depicting a male puppeteer and a puppet of a prostitute. Lady Purple can be seen as a reincarnation of the Marquis de Sade's Juliette because of her monstrous femininity, and therefore, can be seen as a female Bluebeard. Just like Juliette and Bluebeard, Lady Purple seeks her own sexual satisfaction

by sadistically seducing, spoiling and killing her lovers. The drastic reversal of the patriarchal power relations between the sexes is achieved in the puppet theatre where the Asiatic Professor manipulates the puppet of Lady Purple. Although a conventional patriarchal power relationship is formed between the male puppeteer and the female puppet, Lady Purple reverses the power relations in the play, by becoming a female Bluebeard.

Carter's creation of a female Bluebeard is very meaningful in light of the development of her feminist ideas. Carter needed to deconstruct the conventional structure of the patriarchy before moving to the next stage as a feminist writer. By creating a female Bluebeard, not only does she present female sexual subjectivity in an exaggerated way, she also demonstrates the limits of women's freedom after the subversion of the patriarchy. Carter provides the reader with a clearer description of the new life given to women after they gain men's power.

Although it shares many similarities with *The Magic Toyshop*, "The Bloody Chamber" focuses more on the visual power relations between men and women. This is illustrated mostly by the Marquis's visual obsession, which reveals his perversity and fetishism. In addition, Carter focuses more on women's potential power, rather than negatively portraying men's cruelty in the latter. While the masculinist characteristics in Perrault's version remain, and are exaggerated to a certain degree, her emphasis is not on the original lesson for young women that women should not have curiosity, but on the discovery of women's sexual subjectivity. This is achieved by the bride herself, by means of the retrospective narration. The bride as narrator reveals her own sexual desire, which is often reflected in mirrors.

The female characters are depicted as being more independent than the women in Carter's earlier works. The bride's career as a pianist allows her to stay economically independent. Women's skills and occupation are what Carter added to Perrault's version, which is also marked as an important difference

from *The Magic Toyshop*.

The bride achieves emancipation from the male gaze. Unlike the Marquis's singular visual obsession, the bride has other sensitive senses: she hears, feels and smells. In addition to this, the blind piano tuner is introduced as her new lover, with whom she starts a new life. This implies that Carter is trying to deconstruct the conventional binary opposition between men as a viewer and women as the object to be looked at. She instead proposes a new form of relationship without the binary structure of visual power. The bride and the piano tuner seem to have the ability to realize a new form of relationship, whereas Melanie remains exposed to Finn's gaze.

In Carter's later works such as *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, women's subjectivity is represented in the form of performance. Women are not forced to play a female role in men's scripts any more. Women, once emancipated from the male gaze in "The Bloody Chamber," seem to become once again exposed to the male gaze. However, unlike the bride in "The Bloody Chamber," they do not see themselves as men see them. Instead, they exploit their objectivity and freely manipulate the image of themselves that comes to be reflected in men's eyes. For example, Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*, a woman with feathers and also a performer, "playfully mobilizes and parodies the images of womanhood," states Paulina Palmer (31). Having been emancipated from the patriarchy's strings, women in Carter's later works live between the poles of binary power relations, being a puppet master who manipulates themselves subjectively disguised in "the images of womanhood;" they might even exist somewhere beyond the binary relations. Until her premature death in 1992, Carter seems to have sought for the ways in which women can utilize their potential power most freely.

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